

UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN PIT BULL TERRIER

By the general public, little is known about the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT). What they do know has been presented in the form of sensational news stories recounting attacks by these dogs. Is the Pit Bull a monster in dogs' clothing, or is it the victim of circumstances beyond its control?

Size: Males (20-23") Females: (19-21") **Weight:** Males (35-60 lbs.) Females: (30-50 lbs)

Appearance: Compact and heavily muscled, the Pit Bull has a broad head with wide, strong jaws. Its tail is medium length, with a slight curl. The coat is short, dense and glossy with any coloring and markings acceptable by the breed standard. The Pit Bull's ears are naturally uncropped.

Characteristics: Intelligent, courageous, alert, dignified, eager to please, playful, responsive, resourceful, determined

Origins: To better understand the breed, one must look to its past. The Pit Bull was bred first to be a hunter, then a catch dog, and finally a fighter. In "jolly old England", bears and bulls were pitted against dogs in bloody competitions on which bets were placed. Eventually, society became concerned about animal cruelty, and bull- and bear baiting were outlawed, forcing fans to go underground. Since bulls and bears are large animals and were hard to conceal, gamblers began to pit dogs against each other.

The Pit Bull found it's way to America during the colonization of the States. The American version is larger and more robust than the shorter Staffordshire Bull Terrier of England.

The fighter: Any dog can fight, but the Pit Bull was bred for drive, intensity and the determination to win. A Pit Bull may not start a fight, but has the genetics to finish it. Often, the Pit Bull is blamed for the fight, no matter who started it. The fighting gene can't be easily trained or loved out of a dog. Even dogs not bred from recent fighting lines can have the urge to fight arise at any time.

By nature, Pit Bulls are very good with people. Dog aggression and people aggression should not be confused. Unless a Pit Bull has been very poorly bred (by unscrupulous individuals usually using abusive methods) it should not attack people. In the ring, a dog was to obey its master and back off on command.

The current trend on the streets is the Red Nose Pit Bull. Historically called Old Family Reds, the Red Nose was "developed" in Ireland. A true Red Pit Bull will have a red coat, copper red nose, red lips, red toenails, and red or amber eyes. These traits are recessive. The only coloring of a Pit Bull found less often is a white Pit. To attain the Reds, dogs were recessively bred. Reds are known for their "gameness" and therefore are popular in the rings.

The Pit Bull at home: Believe it or not, the Pit Bull makes an excellent housedog. Its medium size, and coat which sheds very little, make it desirable to keep. Its temperament is sound and even. The Pit Bull is intelligent and eager to please, and therefore, is responsive to training. The Pit Bull can be rambunctious until they mature, sometimes not until 2-3 years of age.

In order to provide competent ownership, a Pit Bull owner must recognize and accept that dog aggression is not uncommon with this breed. Owners must use common sense and make sure not to set their dog up for failure by putting them in the wrong situations. By taking precautions, such as never leaving a Pit Bull unattended with another dog, a Pit Bull and other dogs can peacefully coexist. The owner must, however, be committed to taking these, and other, precautionary measures to help keep the peace. A structured environment and a firm, but loving, hand will help provide the proper home for a Pit Bull.

In conclusion: The Pit Bull has proven itself to be an excellent companion for anyone willing to learn about the breed. Unfortunately for these loving and lovable dogs, there are many who view them as a hazard and a threat to the community. The threat comes from the humans who are irresponsibly breeding and fighting these dogs. Viewing them as nothing more than a commodity does the breed a great disservice. The community needs to look beyond the reputation, past the bad press, and into the heart of a Pit Bull, and remain objective. Perhaps the bad press needs to be redirected to the people who are giving the dogs a bad name.

This document is being provided for informational purposes only and is not intended as legal, veterinary, or behavioral counsel.